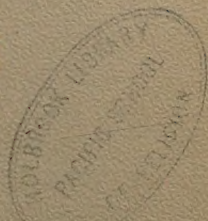
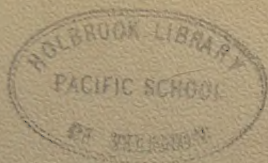


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# **SOCIAL ACTION**

**THE CHRISTIAN FAITH  
AND OUR WORLD**

**Christian Community**

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KENNETH UNDERWOOD  
*Editor*JENNIE EVANS  
*Managing Editor*ROBERT LYNN  
*Assistant to the Editor*

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Departmental staff members are: Shirley E. Greene, Agricultural Relations; Thomas B. Keehn, Christian Citizenship; Francis W. McPeck, Industrial Relations; Herman F. Reissig, International Relations; Galen R. Weaver and Jefferson Rogers, Race Relations.

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# Christian Community

This is the first of a series of six publications by the Council for Social Action providing an interpretation of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the contemporary world. We are calling this a series on "Christian Community," for we are seeking to discover the action of God in the crucial areas of our common life—economics, domestic politics, public opinion, international affairs, and the local church. We wish to respond to His sustaining, judging, redemptive action toward the unifying of men of diverse truths in a community of love and freedom.

The basic series in Protestant social ethics is the culmination of several influences upon this publication. In the past, *Social Action* has printed many issues which were either theological statements by individual Christians or analyses of particular social problems by individual authorities. But no sustained attempt has been made until now to bring religious and social analysis into a common framework of interpretation so that the major areas of economics, politics and local Christian action could be viewed by a Christian layman from an integrated perspective. Yet social education and action groups in the Protestant churches have been discovering that unless such basic literature can be provided, continued, disciplined action among Protestants is not possible on key social problems—only erratic crusades on a multitude of single issues.

The "Christian Community" series will be used by several Protestant educational agencies as a basis for intensive study by groups of Christians in churches, colleges, unions, service clubs across the nation. Many people have been studying past *Social Actions* in this way, and are ready to develop with the aid of this series a consensus of conviction about the nature of our gospel and our world. They want to build on this perspective for action upon many specific and controversial social issues and *Social Action* plans to meet this desire in future publications.

But for now a broad, basic framework of religious and social analysis is needed. New, important Christian action movements are emerging in Protestantism and this series is intended to aid in clarifying the faith from which they have drawn direction and hope.

This series is largely the combined work of nine men who, by the time the last issue is written, will have been meeting together frequently for two years to formulate detailed outlines, allocate research and writing responsibilities, criticize manuscripts. They have been aided by and have sought to build upon the report of the Commission on the

Christian Basis for Social Action to the Council for Social Action. Some of these men are authors of past *Social Actions*; one of the participants is a theologian who critically combines both "liberal" and "neo-orthodox" influences; one is secretary of international relations in the Council for Social Action; one is a lawyer and part-time politician; one is now working on a research grant to study the relation of Christian ethics and the American press; one has recently begun graduate study of the sociology of the Protestant church, after serving for several years as director of rural church work for a major denomination.

The series does not represent a "leveling down" of these men's ideas to a consensus of the least common denominator; it represents a "leveling up" to the specialized knowledge of the expert and the supplementation of his work by that of men who see his specialty from a broader position. The total product will, we believe, be an integrated whole, but it will honor the creativity and the strong impact upon the group of each individual in his area of specialization. This first publication on "The Christian Faith for this World" is, for example, the work chiefly of Dr. Julian Hartt, professor of philosophical theology, Yale University Divinity School.

The other major participants in this series, aside from the editor, are: Edwin Becker, James Laney, Ernest Lefever, Robert Lynn, William Miller, William Muehl and Herman Reissig. In future issues experts in economics, politics, etc., who have served as consultants and have criticized original manuscripts will also be indicated. The entire staff of the Council for Social Action participated in the crucial overall planning stage.

No claim is made that this series accomplishes adequately the difficult task before it. But we knew that the series must be attempted in some such fashion as this. The product is not "slick magazine" reading, but the gospel and the world are falsified when presented as neat and simple in their demands.

We desire your guidance and your prayers in our work. May we avoid the irrelevancies and superficialities and parochial interests of much of present writing on the relation of the Christian faith to our society. May God use our errors and the truth He has given us to publish for the redemption of the world.

—KENNETH UNDERWOOD



# The Christian Faith And Our World

## *A Minister's Soliloquy*

As the minister looks out across his congregation this Sunday their great need seems to roll up toward him as a mighty wave against whose oppressive force he is doomed vainly to struggle. Is his sermon poorly or only partly prepared? By no means. In his congregation and in his Ministers Association he is known and respected for his habits of careful study. He rightly assures himself: my preparation has been unusually careful. It has also been prayerful. I am praying more and more over my sermons, as over my work as a whole. More and more; and more and more desperately.

Desperately, yes. Take the text for the sermon this morning: "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Eph. 4:14, Revised Standard Version). The outline of the sermon had come easily. Illustrations had positively swarmed over it. Yet before he has uttered a word of the sermon it has turned to dust and ashes.

Why, O why, the minister asks, am I unable to speak the searching word, the relevant and creative word, to my people? Here they are, spiritual children, if not orphans, subject to the wildest fluctuations of attitude towards the fundamental problems of our times. Here I am, persuaded of the eternal relevancy of the Gospel, in whose light men should be able to see life steadily and to see it whole. I do not help them.

I preach today on "An Anchor to Windward." I planned to show them how our instability in crisis is produced by alienation from God, and how Jesus Christ redeems us from this alienation, and from the petulant unpredictability of childishness. But from the beginning they will think that I am recommending the Gospel to them as a sweetly powerful sedative for this stormy passage, and the Church as a bulwark of the present

social order. For these recommendations they will gravely and graciously thank me. When they discover that the editorial page of the Sunday paper roundly confirms their understanding of my sermon, they will tell themselves that *their* church at least really has the word for these times. I wonder what they would think if next Sunday I preached on the theme, "Blind Leader of the Blind."

We want to dissuade this preacher from preaching this latter sermon and his laymen from contributing to the despair that produces such a sermon. Let us ask first whether the minister's original theme was a good one, and, second, whether his preparation was really adequate, after all.

How can we possibly doubt whether the theme is timely, pointed, relevant? People are drifting, running before every gust of passion and impulse. The minister is right in feeling that this is tied in with a sense of pervasive meaninglessness. These people are unable, therefore, to cope rationally with the decisive problems of personal and social organization; and they want him to deal exclusively with the symptomatic problems—drunkenness, gambling, sexual immorality, etc. But he knows that people without roots, people deprived of power, people denied the "sense of belonging" can do nothing but drift, or senselessly rebel against moral conventions. Nonetheless he is expected to moralize even upon the text, "Judge not!" To all such Jesus Christ must be preached, because in him is our redemption. Jesus Christ is the Eternal Lord of history and of our lives. He and He alone is the anchor to windward.

## THE CONTINUOUS ACTIVITY OF THE LIVING GOD

After all, then, there must be something deficient in the preparation for this sermon. In fact there are two fundamental and remediable deficiencies: (1) the preacher's grasp upon the verities of Christian faith; (2) his grasp, as Christian, upon the concrete circumstances in which he and his people find themselves. Taking these two things together we ask him, and our-



## Summary Outline

- ★ The depressing irrelevancy of the Gospel as it is often preached. The eternal relevancy of the *whole* Gospel.
- ★ The Gospel: the continuous activity of God—Creating, Sustaining, Redeeming—wholly present in Jesus Christ.
- ★ The Gospel teaches us what to make of what we already know. We know that men—persons-in-community—exist in dynamic interaction with each other. This is *society*. When this interaction becomes creative, then *community* emerges.
- ★ Society, as the natural and positive condition of human life, endures only through justice and love.
- ★ The *general will* of society: In buying a loaf of bread you support more than a particular brand or store. You “will” to keep the whole show going—the processes and persons that brought you the loaf. Such decisions, taken together, make up the general will. Institutions, however, slow to change, depend upon the general will for continued existence.
- ★ How can the general will be transformed so that interaction between men is creative? The Gospel speaks to this question—not by blueprints of “Christian” institutions, but by directives which penetrate every institution.
- ★ The directives of the Christian community:  
*Have the mind of Christ*—unity of community is this love that affirms interaction of persons without diminishing any involved.  
*Unity-in-freedom*—persons bound by love are free to respond to each other without suspicion or hostility.  
*Unity-in-diversity*—persons unified by love freely accept diversities.
- ★ How can the church be a part of the Christian community in realizing these directives and encouraging full responsibility for them?

selves, *how does the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, Incarnate Lord, lay hold of ourselves and our world?* This question no one can answer by looking to the organization of sermons and to the reservoir of illustrations. Through all of this and beyond all of it we must allow ourselves to be confronted by the radical demands that God in Jesus Christ makes.

### *What We Learn about God from Christ*

Now we remember that our preacher meant to hold up to our fretful restlessness and mutability the unchanging Christ,

"the same yesterday, today and forever." All right. Is he prepared to tell us what of God we learn from this, and what of ourselves? Suppose that we follow his lead here—the lines of a hymn known to all:

Change and decay in all things round I see:  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

We are overpoweringly aware of change and decay, without and within. A great chorus of scholars and seers reinforces this awareness with its proclamations that Civilization is passing away before our eyes; and we are alternately sober and silly as it harmonizes:

"The world's dying: or gone a-ground:  
Are there enough pallbearers to go around?"

But the woes alone cannot bring us to make the very large drafts upon constructive faith without which our decisive problems will swamp us. Therefore, we need the *whole Gospel*, so that we may know how God relates himself to the scene of change and decay. He reveals himself as changeless, yes, but as changeless *what*? He is more than that which is simply other than the changing world. As living faith apprehends God he is *activity*, he reveals himself as creative will, inexhaustibly rich in being, powerful beyond all mortal reckoning, righteous and good. His is a righteousness and goodness before which all human moral schemes, so far as they are built of neat and rigid distinctions and calculative principles, are "filthy rags."

God is as God does, this is his witness to himself. And God's doings, what are they? Creating, Sustaining, Redeeming. No one of these words points to a process completed in some past time. They all denote the continuous activity of the living God. "The Lord is the true God, he is the living God and an everlasting king." (Jer. 10:10) Thus whatever else acts, acts because God is God. He calls forth its activity (Creating) and provides the conditions for its continuation (Sustaining) and cherishes its particular value and brings it to consummation through everything that frustrates it (Redeeming).



Changelessness" then is something bound up with God's activity as righteous and merciful will. The everlasting sameness of God is seen in his continuously active mercy. Thus Jeremiah says: "His loving kindness endureth forever" (33:11) and, "I (The Lord) have loved thee with an everlasting love" (31:3). This God, from age to age the same, is he whose power and wisdom are inexhaustible, and who graciously bestows strength and wisdom upon the needy and the afflicted, thereby empowering them to triumph over vicissitude and weakness (Isa. 40:28-31).

### *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*

This enduring, unchanging goodness and love of God is wholly present and active in Jesus Christ, God's everlasting Yes, the absolute confirmation of God's faithfulness in promise and covenant (Cf. II Cor. 1:19, 20; Heb. 6:17). Jesus Christ is the free gift of God's infinite love, reconciling the world unto himself, healing its alienation and hostility (John 3:16; II Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:20). All that God does, he does in and through and for this love, incarnate in Jesus Christ (John 1:1-5, 14; Col. 1:15-20). Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose, a purpose and power embracing and penetrating the full sweep of history and the entire cosmos. Therefore history has not come to a stop in Christ. The fateful struggle with "powers and principalities" continues unabated (Eph. 6:11-13), but the power of God unto salvation has entered history in Christ (Rom. 1:16).

From this Lord no point or moment is hidden, and therefore wherever we are in time, whatever phase or condition our society and civilization are in, Jesus Christ is in our midst, and we must relate ourselves as we are to divine activity. There is no hiding place. There is no returning, either, to a prior condition. As we are we hear the demand: "Repent ye!" This repentance is not reversion; it is heeding the demand of the living God in the moving present to acknowledge our situation and to enter into creative communion with him. We are alienated from this com-

munion, this community, and in the living Christ God calls us to be recreated within it. Only then shall we grow into the full stature of "sons of God and heirs of the kingdom" (Rom. 8:16, 17), of which Jesus Christ is the sustaining life (Eph. 4:15, 16).

## PERSONS IN COMMUNITY

It is through faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ that we are able to grasp most effectively and most clearly the concrete realities of the human situation, but not as though we knew nothing here apart from Christ. Rather, we learn in Christ what to make of what we otherwise know. We know that we are *persons-in-community*. We know that as persons we have socially-acquired ideals and that we live in a natural world. But neither "ideals" nor "nature" grasps our actual personal existence at its core. For this purpose we need the notions of *will*, *emotion*, and *reason*. All of these reveal the essentially dynamic character of human life, but at first glance *will* and *emotion* more clearly than *reason*.

### *Will, Emotion and Reason in Persons*

*Will* is more than bodily appetite or impulse stirred into action by some cause outside ourselves, and it is also much more than "making a wish." It is the power by which a person propels himself to realize his potentialities in action. *Emotion* is more than feeling prompted by external causes, as though a person were only an organ played on mechanically by the environment. Through emotions a person expresses an "evaluation" of another person or of society. Love as emotion is a "positive" or "affirmative" evaluation. Love is also a dimension of will, for emotion and will interpenetrate. Hatred and fear are "negative" evaluations, since they prompt the person either to get rid of something or somebody or to escape a "presence" that seems threatening. Emotion interpenetrates all our action, many times being the inducement to action. It registers the adequacy of action and the degree of satisfactoriness of the person's present situation. Thus *will* always acts in the context of emotion, since





the latter reflects what has happened and suggests a line of response to it.

*Reason* is the "power of understanding," by which the real character of things is apprehended and the will, accordingly, is enabled to act intelligently rather than blindly. Reason has two major aspects: understanding and imagination. These actually interpenetrate each other, but we shall at first consider them separately.

Understanding recognizes the repeated patterns which people evidence in life. Thus I say I *understand* another person not only by recognizing the shape of his face, his peculiar habits of speech, etc., but also by grasping what he is up to as a *will*, whose intentions shape all that he does. *How* this kind of empathy for others by reason is possible, is highly mysterious. But it is a foundation-stone of all society.

This power of understanding is also a very important aspect of our communion with God. When God judges "that my people are foolish, they know me not; they are sottish children and they have no understanding" (Jer. 4:22), it means that through disobedience their awareness of God's will has been obscured, if not blinded. And so in *Ephesians* we are counselled: "be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of God is" (5:17).

But reason is also imagination. Imagination is a kind of *projective* knowing, a running ahead of the present. This is more than pure guess-work to the extent that the person really apprehends the intentions of himself and others operating in a particular situation. Imagination and will interpenetrate each other, because the person acts as he *imagines* things may be shaped. Not only this. When he acts as he imagines other people will act, he acts in *faith*. He cannot plumb the depths of freedom in which others act, but in making his intention plain to them, and in committing himself, he calls to them to do likewise. This has profound implications as we shall see in later articles in influencing the relations of institutions and nations.

Reason as *imagination and faith*, is another very important dimension of our communion with the living God, for this God is



utterly faithful (cf. Ps. 89:1, 2). He is steadfast and immovable in his merciful intentions. Jesus Christ is the full and perfect revelation of the faithful God, who commits himself to action in history, for us and for our redemption. In reply we commit ourselves. And this commitment is faith, by which we go forth not knowing whither we go but trusting in the revealing Lord, and "projecting" ourselves into the accomplishment of his purpose.

### *Our Involvement in Each Other's Lives*

God's action reveals the indelibly social character of personal existence. When we lose our grasp upon this fundamental fact we are likely to be driven far from the routes of health and growth by the contrary winds of doctrine, "Individualism" and "Collectivism." Individualism in our modern sense is wholly foreign to the Christian Faith. As we frequently conceive the "individual," he is a *non-personal entity*, a kind of spiritual atom existing in independence of all essential bonds with others. However, he finds it useful, from time to time, to throw out and to receive some lines of relationship with other "atoms." He also finds it useful, from time to time, to dissolve these ties when the whim (a mysterious "self-interest") dictates.

But "Collectivism" builds also with illusions and errors. The "collective" is also a non-personal entity in which the individual submerges himself and the sense of personal dignity and responsibility which he cannot possibly honor as a detached or detachable "atom." Thus both "Individualism" and "Collectivism" reveal a profound and disastrous alienation from creative and redemptive community in which alone persons can mature.

### *Habits and Structures in Society*

We are saying that human beings exist in dynamic interaction with one another. This is society. When this interaction becomes fundamentally creative and is engaged in by responsible persons then we may say community exists. Thus "society," "community," "person" are all dynamic actualities. But each of these also has "patterns" or "structures" which appear to be static. Society has institutions. Persons have habits. Institutions and habits are "es-

tablished routes of activity"; they are, as such, organizations of life that have a kind of independence of the will. This independence is no illusion, as anybody knows who has tried to change his habits or who has tried to change institutions. But this does not mean that these "static patterns" obey laws wholly independent of will, or wholly resistant to both rational and irrational control and change. Here is another point at which we must be steadied, or we shall continue to be blown hither and thither, believing at one moment that institutions have laws of their own and are absolutely resistant to rational control, and now believing that they can be easily and rapidly changed if a group of right-thinking people will form a league to do so, and if the league succeeds in getting a good chairman and a favorable press.

The independence of economic and political institutions is their relative stability and permanence over against particular persons. These "habits of the common life" *are*, as a rule, impervious to immediate alteration by the action of the single person, however heroic and powerful. Thoreau did not stop the Mexican War by his refusal to pay the taxes which supported it. Jesus did not immediately alter the economic life of the Temple by driving off the "thieves and robbers." Yet the single person may kindle the flame for which the fuel already exists. Jefferson did not launch the Revolution by penning the immortal words of the Declaration of Independence: the "spirit of revolution" commanded his pen, and a new state of affairs was forthcoming, a new course of events.

### *The Roles Men Play*

The independence of institutions is one element of impersonality in society. There is another such element, closely related to the first. Every member of society has multiple roles he plays in it, and in the very nature of the case he puts more of himself into some roles than he puts into others. For instance, Bill Smith is a father, a druggist, a Rotarian, a volunteer fireman, a Presbyterian, a white man, a Republican, a voter, a taxpayer,



a consumer, a subscriber to the local newspaper and *The Druggist*, a national trade journal.

The roles we play tend to overlap in all directions. Thus, Paul Lazarsfeld in his study of voting habits in Erie County, Ohio (*The Peoples Choice*) can say that church membership tends to be a "composite index"—Smith, if he is a Presbyterian, will probably vote Republican, be a member of a profession or business and belong to one of the social clubs such as Rotarians or Lions. Some of these roles engage far less of one's personal resources and interests than the others. Bill Smith probably is more concerned with his role as a seller of drugs, hot water bottles and cokes than as a consumer of an even wider variety of goods than his drug store sells. He probably belongs to the Druggist Association but not to Consumers Union. Yet we are so constituted in freedom that *any* of these roles can become, or can be made to seem, our deepest and most vital forces, our "really big part."

The multiplicity of roles reveals the great complexity of society, and one of the ways in which depth and vividness of personal involvement fade away into "impersonality." Smith as father is deeply and vividly involved in a family community—or he had better be! Smith as taxpayer is involved far less deeply and vividly; the focus of will here is nothing like so sharp, and emotion tends to be "thin" and dull. When it is necessary or expedient to sharpen Smith's focus in this role, "personal symbols," symbols evoking projection of himself, must be used. For example, the Federal Government must be cartooned as a horrible octopus out to seize and consume him, or as the "bureaucrat" living next door who is able to buy a new car every year while Smith scrimps to keep his jalopy out of the hands of the junk-dealer. So also Smith's role as "white-man" is impersonally played, depending, to some extent, of course, upon where he lives. When somebody judges it expedient to sharpen his focus here, he is asked: "Would you like to have *your* daughter marry a Negro?" So we see that life in society is something like keeping many balls in the air at once. Attention is bound to drift, or be pulled away from some of them by the expert manipulation of

professionals serving various organized interests. This is going on all the time, with all sorts of consequences, some of them tragic. One of the crucial problems of our society as we shall see later is the development of the sense of personal involvement in and the channelling of moral concern toward the areas of life in which the most crucial decisions—in terms of their effect upon the welfare of others—are being made.

### *A World of Tension*

The patterns, the combinations and organizations of personal activity are constantly changing, within a context of relative stability. Relative stability only, because behind "multiple roles" and "independent institutions" and "economic laws" there are active wills or persons, responding to the living God, organizing into groups and movements to cope with changing natural and social conditions, and colliding with one another in the pursuit of dominant and peripheral concerns.

I tell my neighbor that I shall "take steps" if he doesn't keep his Great Dane out of my flower beds. These seem to be colliding interests, my interest is growing flowers, his is helping his dog develop his (the dog's) inherent possibilities. My speaking to him reveals an intention, and to this he must make some kind of response. Perhaps he will reply that I shouldn't have planted flowers his dog is so especially fond of and that he is going to do nothing about it. So I call the police, or resolve to tear everything out and plant cactus.

What we have in any concrete encounter, even at this level, is a situation in which the action of a person is the occasion for the action of another person. Because the first acts for some purpose, the other must modify his own life to some degree. His consequent action reveals this, and reveals it as something which the first person must understand and respond to, that response itself being a modification of *his* life and purpose. All human action, then, occurs as *give-and-take*, and this interaction enters into the very core of human existence. Every person is both "giver" and "taker."



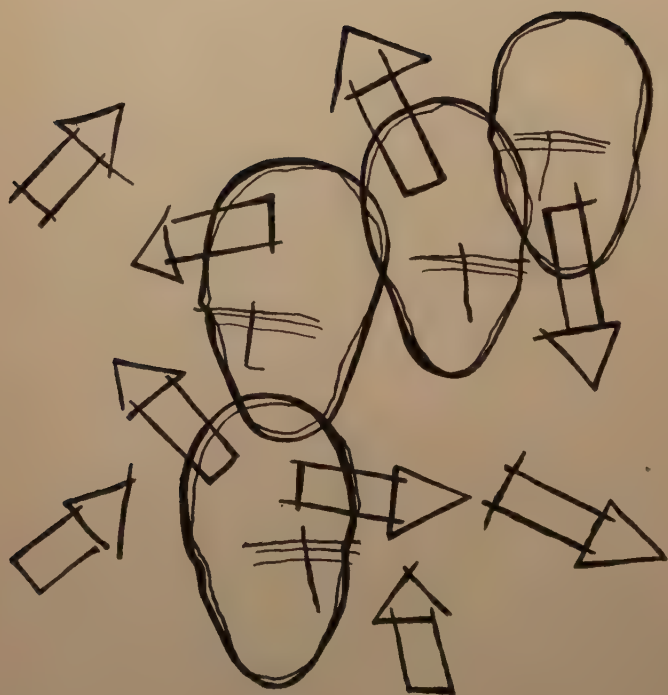
Therefore, human life is *existence in tension*. Call it *tension* because it is a real network of activity among wills mutually resisting absorption into another will. *Tension* is the word for this natural state of affairs in and for which God creates us. *Conflict* is the word for the state of affairs in every actual society in which *tension* has certain destructive dimensions and consequences. Between ourselves and God there is naturally (that is, through creation) *tension*: I cannot absorb God into my own being, make him a slave to my will, and God *will* not absorb me, or reduce me to a "thing," or to a slavish existence before him. And thereby creative community, God and man, man and man, is tension expressed in the full and free "affirmation" of the other-than-myself. In this affirmation I become myself. *Conflict*, on the contrary, is tension expressed not only as the "collision of dominant interests" but as my attempt to "absorb" another person or to resist violent absorption. Collisions of interests sometimes follow from the failure of understanding. *Policies of absorption originate always in a much deeper malady of emotion and will*. This will be made clear as this series of *Social Action* deals, for example, with the conflicts between Russian Communism and the West.

## THE MORAL NATURE OF SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY

In every actual society tension has certain destructive dimensions and consequences. Does this mean that society is inherently sinful or evil? We are not ready to cope with this question until we have acknowledged the following facts: (1) society is the milieu of all ideals and policies; (2) society is the natural and positive condition of human life; (3) society is naturally and inescapably committed to seeking justice; (4) society endures only through the "love" of its constituent members. These we shall now consider in this order.

### *Society Is the Milieu of All Ideals*

(1) Society is the milieu of all ideals and policies. All in-



terests and purposes, whether constructive or destructive, arise in the context of society. The individual does not bring to society and to his group within it his programs and aims already cut and dried and then discover that he must re-build his schemes. Aims and ideals arise in the actual give-and-take of society. This does not mean that there are no enduring purposes and transcending ideals. Enduring purposes and transcending ideals, where they are continuously relevant, are sufficiently general, vague and flexible to allow for an indefinite variety of concrete embodiments. The "content" of these enduring ideals reveals the degree to which persons and societies live in communion with the Living God, for God, through his spirit, acts in every moment to create, sustain, expand and transform wills. So far as "ideals" illuminate the potentialities of persons in actual situations, just so far are they significant and reliable.

### *Society Is the Positive Condition of Human Life*

Whatever conflicts these ideals may engender (2) society is together with this the natural and positive condition of human life. It is not something cruelly designed to suppress the "natural" interests of human beings, and it is not something that irresistibly corrupts their private virtues. We should devoutly hope that men will be prevented by common sense from falling into the worst of the practical consequences of this kind of perversity; but men are greatly confused by the idea nonetheless. Their confusion expresses itself concretely in their support of leaders and policies that attack social controls of economic activities as being "unnatural" suppression of "natural" private rights and interests. Certain of these controls may have generally harmful effects but not because of their inhibition of "natural" interests.

But on the other hand society reflects vastly more than the desire of individuals to "cooperate." Cooperation already presupposes society. The "social contract" presupposes an actual framework of society, a network of working relationships, underlying specific intentions to modify and improve it. Thus, the condition of the Israelites so graphically described by *Judges*



as every man doing just as he pleased (cf. Judg. 21:25) does not mean that society had disappeared. A very inadequate society exists in such a situation because the people have repeatedly forsaken God, and because such a society cannot assure justice. One of the monumental achievements of the prophetic spirit is the unification of these two standards of judgment of Hebrew society: false or idolatrous worship not only *leads* to social injustice; social injustice is itself at the very heart of heathenish religion (cf. Amos 5:4, 15, 21-24). The condemnation of heathenism, accordingly, is not that it is off on the wrong foot so far as ritual and liturgy are concerned. Rather that the cult is ethically rotten, a spreading, festering sore in the *body* of society and a stench in the nostrils of the righteous God.

### *Society Is Committed to Seeking Justice*

This leads us to a further fact. (3) *Society is naturally and inescapably committed to seeking justice.* Society organizes will-power to make it responsible and amenable to creative purposes. In all stages of development men recognize that justice as "equity" is and must be involved in the organization and distribution of power and responsibility. "Equity" is a general, vague, and flexible ideal meaning, to begin with, fairness, reasonableness. Members of society are to be treated (and they are to treat one another) "fairly," because each has a stake (himself) in that society and because each is a power in himself that must be reckoned with. The "claims" of the individual, his "rights," are quite literally nothing apart from his power of registering and enforcing his interests. "Power to enforce" is much more complex than simple physical force. Some very powerful claimants in our society have no significant physical force whatever, for example, babies, the elderly, the ill, the maimed. "Power" in the human realm, clearly, is a very complex affair.

Now the economic and political institutions of society have no other *inherent* purpose than that of organizing power for the "equitable" distribution of the goods produced and the equitable provision for the enjoyment of the values in that

society. "Equitable" does not necessarily mean "equal," even though as democrats we are inclined to believe that the structures and organizing principles of our society derive in strict necessity from the Nature of Man, the Moral Order and the changeless Decree of the Eternal God. Actually *every* society creates and then justifies inequalities, distinctions of superior and inferior in respect to social status, if not inherent difference of potentialities. In fact "inherent differences of potentialities" is one of the commonest pleas entered by society in justification of preferential treatment for certain persons and groups and for prejudicial treatment of other persons and groups.

Granted, then, the universality of the distinction between the superior and the inferior, the only practically important question that every society confronts is, how to assure a *proportioned* (not an equal) distribution of goods and opportunities. To answer this no fixed formulae, no calculable ratios have ever for long been found satisfactory, and for the best reason in the world: the human situation is too fluid and open to give such formulae anything more than the faintest glow of plausibility. Response to the organization of power is restlessly active. The order of distribution is "affirmed" (loved) only so long as it appears to be doing its appointed tasks; otherwise, the order is "negated" (hated or feared). When the latter occurs all the fixed ratios become irrelevant. Then either some "negotiable compensation" for a comparatively weak group no longer equitably provided for is forthcoming, or the order collapses under tensions explosively destructive.

With some attention to what we are calling here "negotiable compensation" we can describe the fourth principle mentioned above, (4) *society endures only through the love of its constituent members.*

### *Material Compensations*

"Negotiable compensation" reveals at once the basic social concern for justice and the ways in which this aim is cheated of its full demand. These compensations are principally of two

sorts: (a) the redistribution of material goods, (b) psychological bonuses and rewards. So far as (a) is a "compensation" it aims only at the *redistribution of goods* and not at all at the redistribution of power and responsibility. The former is proposed to pacify the demand for the latter, for what a society must at least seem to afford for all its real constituents is not only enjoyment of goods but significant exercise of power-responsibility as well.

Thus labor leaders in this country have been known to say that all they wanted was a bigger slice of industries' income for their unions. Management leaders on the other hand sometimes respond to monetary demands of labor with cheerfulness, providing working comforts, fresh paper towels, pension benefits, etc. to keep the worker happy out of increased productivity or prices. Anything that threatens to make this creature unhappy by tantalizing him with illusory prospects of acquiring power beyond his station, is viewed with profound suspicion.

### *Psychological and Moral Compensations*

The first kind of compensation is very rarely proffered without (b) the psychological compensations. These are moral and religious. For instance, economically inferior (in the sense of weak) persons and groups are assured that poverty has its unique values. The simple life is the blessed life, the life free from the corrupting responsibilities of great power. This wisdom is rarely considered digestible by those who dispense it: there is no heavy wave of voluntary migration from Park Avenue to the lower East Side, or from thrones and chancelleries to the two-room walk-up of the plumber's assistant. Or, the inferior are lauded as the splendid inarticulate foundation of our whole life and culture. They have their reward: upon their broad shoulders the elite stand. Again, the Negro is assured that in our culture he has his place. He has given us the "spiritual." And because of his proximity to uncomplicated savagery, if not to a much lower species of mammal in general, he is spared the neurotic agonies of his more delicate white brother.



And before all the inferior in our culture the shining slogan floats: *you may better yourselves, but apply for these benefits one at a time*. You may better yourselves, but not only by dint of greater industry and initiative. You must also publicly and continuously avow your acceptance of the standards and aims of the dominant, the superior. On these terms, individuals may come into power from below.

To these "moral" inducements the religious compensations are added, perhaps with decreasing frequency, perhaps with diminishing efficacy, so far as traditional forms are concerned. These compensations are often presented at once as promise and threat. Thus we hear it preached that the contemporary organization of society is the direct and permanent embodiment of the Divine Will, or at least it was in McKinley's time. All proposals of change would be, or have been, disobedience and sacrilege. So also we are told today that the original American political system was a "simple and immutable" pattern licensed directly by God, whose wrath is visited upon all who would unsettle it. It is also preached that what God requires of us is private honesty, a benevolent interest in individuals as individuals, sobriety, sexual purity, and a wide *cordon sanitaire* between us and the wicked world.

Still another tack is equally familiar. God in Jesus Christ comes to save individuals, to save them in their hearts, and not to save godless institutions. If your heart therefore is right, He will crown you with eternal life. In the presence of such radiant promises, frequently made against the background of humming a capella choirs or the muffled roll of kettle drums, who would profane the sanctuary by asking for a 40-hour week and sickness benefits, or who would effront the Holy Spirit by asking, Who hired the evangelist?

### *Society Endures Through Love of Members*

These things are often preached in great sincerity. Our present concern is not with this sincerity but with the clear social function of such preachments: they are compensations. They are

calculated to render an order acceptable when it has ceased to provide an equitable distribution of power-responsibilities. They are designed to create at least the illusion of dignity and of creative participation in the common life. They exist to elicit an emotional judgment of love and trust towards the order and towards the superior persons and groups. They may also exist to deaden many an uneasy conscience among the "masters," that is, to permit the superiors to believe that they are loved not in spite of but because of their superiority.

What is everlastingly sound in all such compensatory devices is simply this: the cohesive principle of any society, of society as such, is love. If this "affirmation" is not spontaneously forthcoming and rationally supportable, if it does not proceed naturally and irresistibly from people's understanding of their situation, then it must be gotten forcibly, by artifice, deception, lie—by beclouding the understanding and corrupting the imagination to the point where the will accepts the stone and the serpent, proudly and gratefully, and pronounces them loaf and fish, and smothers the lords and masters with protestations of undying love for all such benefactions. And the epitaph over all such societies is always the same: "they who took up this sword, died by it."

We are seeing that the aim of justice is love, and that every society strives for this justice because without love it cannot endure. Society is therefore not so much a matter of common interests—though they are certainly present and important—as it is of love. Therefore when we read that Jesus Christ is he "in whom all things hold together" (Col. 1:17) we see that this is everlastingly true: love is the principle of cohesiveness in society as such. Other principles are superimposed upon this love by every society, and come to contradict it. When that happens, society can be temporarily sustained by violence, psychological and physical; but nothing except radical transformation will save it. Herein is Jesus Christ shown forth as the Judge and Lord of all nations (Rev. 19:11).

## *The Nature of Community*

So far then as a society is a going concern it has some of the essential features of a community. A community is a society in which the commonalty of interests is not only more clearly defined than in society at large but in which interests are guided and channeled by "reciprocating love"—love in experienceable mutuality. Thus community is not built upon a "higher" principle than society; it is the same principle more dramatically incarnated.

We apologists for democratic political institutions may preach the worth of the individual person with the tongues of angels; but unless the person is sustained in his dominant roles by love, all such preachments are sounding brass. If he cannot find this in his family, he must find it in his church, or in his local union, or his club—there is no telling what kind of association may become for him a community. Apart from community there is no fully personal existence. Only in community is "life worth living." Alienation from community is—"death."

The more complex the society, the greater the demands upon patience and imagination. For instance, "justice" in the family is a relatively simple problem. The proportioning of responsibility to power, and of the goods and values of the family, has of course to be worked at all the time, but this is a problem that can be encompassed by reasonableness and good will. But now in a highly developed society justice is an incomparably greater problem. Persons are not so easily made aware of the immediate impact of their action and of their involvement in the lives of others.

## THE GENERAL WILL IN SOCIETY

Yet all social structures are responsive to the "general will." This "general will" is a factor, vague but powerful, in all the activities of persons in a society. It is that barely conscious factor in my buying a loaf of bread, by which I "decide" to support the economic structure we call the market. When I buy bread I am immediately aware of the store, the storekeeper, the money that



changes hands, but I am also vaguely aware of processes and persons spreading out in all directions from this situation. I am not only aware of these wider realities. I *will* the continued existence of this whole interconnected system. I conspire to keep the whole show going. I "conspire," not by a fell scheming but by conscious participation in the collaboration of many persons to bring me this loaf of bread, in the concurrence finally of all the persons who are constituent members of this society.

### *Moral Schizophrenia and the "General Will"*

This fact of my participation in a universal concurrence at once personal and impersonal, the presence of this general will in my will is a source of great distress to many of us. It amounts in our society to a kind of moral schizophrenia: even as I protest against the fearful inequities of the economic and political order, I use it for all it is worth. I enjoy its rewards. I will its continuance through every simple little business transaction. But the blacker we paint our situation, the less we can attribute this schizophrenia simply to the visitation of divine wrath upon us. We have at least to look for mechanisms by which to effect a rational modification of the system itself. Beyond that, and penetrating all our efforts, *we hope for the transformation of the general will itself*. However ponderous and stable social institutions may be, they rest, every one, upon the "general will."

#### A CONCRETE PROBLEM IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GENERAL WILL

A farmer looks proudly at his herd of beef cattle. He is an active church member and known in his community as a "good, practical Christian guy." Can this man come to see that his role of cattle-raiser meshes into the peace of the world? Can he see that his decision and that of his business associates as to whether they will fight price controls set by the government to avoid inflation has an intimate relation to the ability of this nation to meet its commitments abroad? If this man cannot, has not his church very likely lost its grip upon both the world and the Gospel?

The "general will" has a recognizably greater importance in western, democratic society than in non-democratic societies in which the masses act only through "agents," or in which policy and polity are handed down from the top to the "people." In democracy the form of government and the policy are vested in the "will of the people." Hence the peculiar stress given in the United States to the *transformation of the general will*. What is of decisive significance about the transformation of the "general will" is this: in our society the crucial problems now involve almost without exception what people have come to regard as peripheral roles. We know in a normally dim way that we are involved in tremendous social crises—economic instability, domestic political stalemates, international power struggles. But we have no steady and reasonable comprehension of how and how deeply we are involved.

The "general will," accordingly, must be "transformed." What is now peripheral for people and thus only faintly touched by emotion and only vaguely understood must be brought into the center of personal involvement. This can only be done by making these absolutely critical problems "community" problems. The question, therefore, of the control of educational and popular communicative mechanisms (to be discussed in a future number of this *Social Action* series) is very great, because so far these mechanisms are used generally to capture the imagination for special and provincial interests. We must try now to manage them for "general interests" as well, so that the individual may be projected into those roles which must be properly played if our civilization is to survive and to develop creatively.

### *Key Areas or Roles*

Indeed, the very nature of our society is such that certain key points or centers develop where decisions made have tremendous influence over the lives of others. These major roles or influential activities might be said to form around three key areas:

- 1) Organization and law with which *politics* is chiefly concerned;

- 2) Production and distribution of goods with which *economics* is chiefly concerned.
- 3) Formulation of ideas and attitudes with which *public opinion* and so called "mass communications" is chiefly concerned.

Therefore, the second of this *Social Action* series will deal with Politics, the third with Economics, the fourth with Public Opinion, the fifth with World Affairs, in which all three of these aspects of existence are deeply involved, and the sixth with the local church and its role in relating the whole gospel of Christ to these aspects of life. Those faithful to the God revealed in Jesus Christ will not flee responsible activity in these key roles, nor the discipline of factual understanding of these areas so necessary to the making of Christian judgments within them.

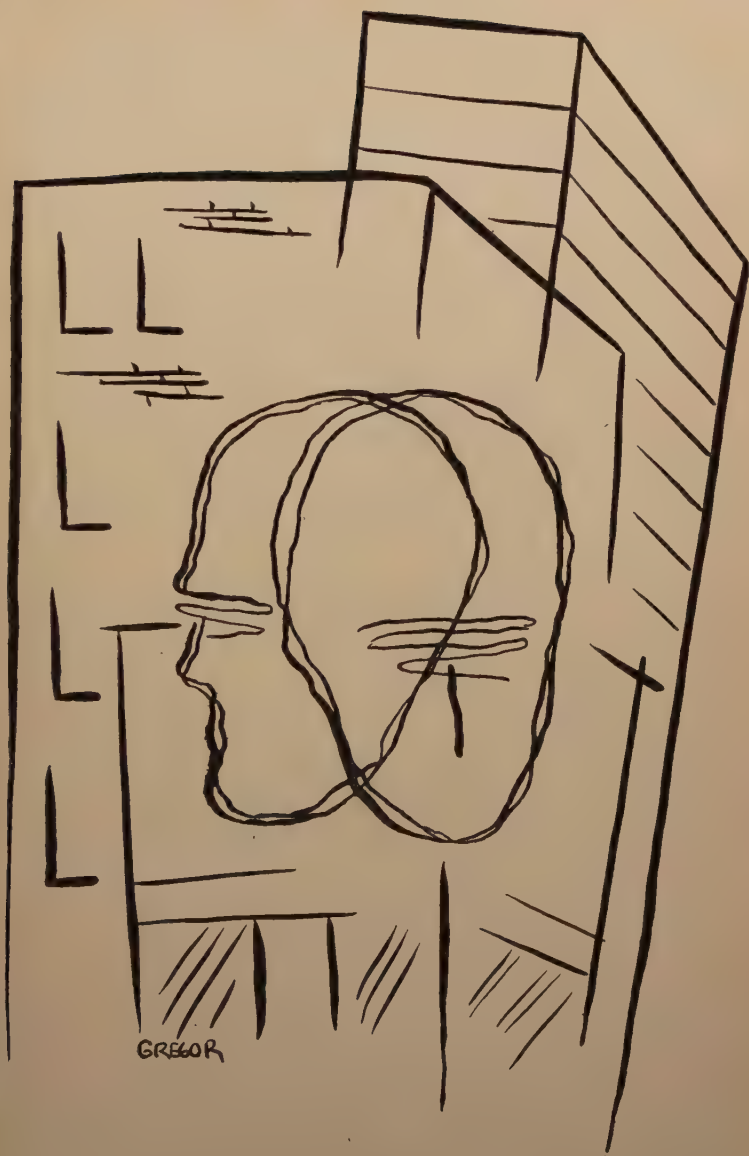
"Transformation" then of the "general will" should not suggest anything at all of *permanent* fulfillment, of *final* solution in history. It means that *our* critical problems arise in the "general will" and must be "solved" (that is, prevented from dissolving our common life and its traditions) through the "general will." Moreover, the "salvation" of the person, either in history or beyond history is not the immediate concern here. The point is, whether the person is "egoistic" or not, or whether his "sin" is self-love or not, in *our* society the individual *is* caught up in the general will, and he does play roles in which he is *constrained* to act in relation to purposes far broader than immediate self-gain.

Granted the foregoing, we must then ask, by what directives, in the light of what ends, shall we reorganize, or re-structure the "general will," in order to keep before us the decisive roles and the ways in which they must be filled? For the sake of what shall we ask ourselves to become *fully* involved in the operation of our economic-political structures?

The reality of the Christian Community speaks to these questions.

God creates us for free fellowship with himself in Jesus





Christ (Rom. 7:23), for the Christian community of perfecting love. For the consummation of this purpose Christ lives in us. Life in this Christian community, the ultimate goal, so dramatically witnessed to in the Bible, should have a real bearing upon the whole fabric of society. The primary consideration is what channeling, what direction, what organization we are prepared to give our wills, personal and general (cf. I John 3:18; Matt. 7:21). If it is the living God whom we hear, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then we shall be prepared to make our society responsive to the standards and directives of Christian community.

## THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Two questions are now before us: (1) What are the "standards and directives" of Christian community? (2) Along what lines, general and flexible, may these be applied to society at large?

As to the first question we note at the outset that there is no Christian community in the sense in which there are other communities. *There are Christian principles relating to the various relations of persons, but there are no Christian institutions or social structures as such.* This holds for the churches as for all other institutions. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is an on-going activity, transcending and penetrating every tradition and institution. The Spirit bloweth where it listeth; and the Son of Man claims no permanent mailing address in history.

No society is grounded in divine approval in this way. But may we not legitimately foster the belief that society as we know it is a consequence of our true apprehension of God, so long as we do not claim the society to be a rigidly inevitable or necessary one? God speaks, and men conceive of a society as a translation of His uttered purpose. We are "to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly in His sight." But not through Prophet, Law-Giver, or His only-begotten Son has God furnished a blueprint or a complete set of operating instructions.

## *The Directives of Christian Community: Have the Mind of Christ*

We look then for standards that are primarily directives rather than instruments for measuring achievement and shortcoming. Surely the first and most inclusive of these directives is: "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The ground of unity and of community is love in the proper and full sense, a love that affirms the interaction of persons and which does not diminish one of the persons or groups interacting. Institutions grow from this interaction, such as the treasury the disciples established for poor-relief. This institution did not exist for the aggrandizement of one at the expense of the others. It existed to make concretely effective the "general will" of the disciples and of their Master. The same may be said for the divisions of labor in the apostolic church. Mechanisms give flesh and blood to the spirit; they are to be used rightly, that is, to enhance and strengthen the common life in Christ.

### *Unity-in-Freedom*

The unity of Christian community is (a) unity-in-freedom and (b) unity-in-diversity. These are different ways—and not so very different at that—of spelling out the unity of love. (a) Unity-in-freedom means a manner of people being together which is not coercive, either physically or mentally. It means a unity not produced by force or sustained by fear, resentment, guilt, or anxiety.

If we think for the moment even of the first historical embodiments of Christian community, we should still have to suppose that such factors as fear continued to work. But what is the claim? "We are no longer under bondage to fear." In Christ, we are freed from slavery to the negative. We continue to struggle against all such powers, but the struggle is no longer an unequal and foredoomed struggle of slave against master (Rom. 8:15). "Perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18). Jesus Christ is God affirming our existence; he is God evoking



our whole positive potentialities. We do not know what we shall be through this action (I John 3:2) but we know that in this community there is fullness of life. Therefore, as he loves us, we love one another, affirming one another, making our own existence a "Yes" and "Amen" to neighbor, to friend and to foe. Therefore the unity of Christian community is freedom. One is free *to become* in creative interaction with others also in the process of becoming.

"Laws" or rules for this becoming there must certainly be. These must be arbitrarily imposed at the start (Gal. 4:1 ff), but they are designed to bring us into "mature manhood" (Eph. 4:13), into that kind of responsible exercise of power that "builds up the brotherhood" as a whole (Rom. 14:19). Here there is no hint, anymore, of law as an immutable system of principles. Christ is the end of the law in that sense (Rom. 10:4). The "law" that is now an internal ruling principle is simply: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10). The reason for this is plain. We have communion with God through faith and not through conformity to a law.

Within this community many prudential rules develop, to lend a stable framework to the common life, but the spirit is always the master of these rules, whether they are the rules of the church or of some other organization (cf. Mark 3:27; Rom. 14). Therefore whatever of individual privilege a person surrenders, he surrenders not in order to comply with a regulation but "for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14:19). Such loss of prerogative is gain in terms of life and power.

### *Unity-in-Diversity*

So we see that Christian community is already (b) unity-in-diversity. We are directed to maintain the diversity as well as the unity. Accordingly, whatever curtails this diversity and moves community towards a mechanical uniformity is judged and found wanting.

This diversity is both a diversity of function and a diversity

of persons. Diversity of significant function is to be accompanied at every step with recognition of the significance of the particular function to the community (I Cor. 12). In Christian community there is no distinction between superior and inferior. All functions are necessary, and they do not fall into a hierarchical scale of power and significance. The "greatest" is the "least," the "servant" of all, which is simply to say that Christian community overcomes the whole system of values bound up with the distinction between greatness and littleness (Matt. 20:25-27). Significance is not derived merely from what one is doing, but from the common life for which it is done, and in which the worth of one's existence is affirmed.

Christian community directs us also towards diversity of persons. A person is created with unique potentialities, and these are brought into play in a "give-and-take" with a dynamic environment, social, natural, divine, through which he labors to become—himself. He is not ordained to be like somebody, that is, to subordinate his being and its powers to another's pattern and power, in order to be the "ideal" husband or lover or citizen or whatever. So far as he employs his powers of imitation well, it is not to make him a "duplicate" of somebody else, but it is to acclimate him to a cultural environment in which he lives and to which he will make his own positive contribution if he is not thwarted by natural or social obstacles.

"Diversity" directs our attention again to the fact of tension in the human realm. We have seen that Christian community is the context of love in which the tension of diverse and contrasting wills is creative. Christian community maximizes contrast, in giving persons freedom to achieve unique maturity in a give-and-take that rules out "policies of absorption" and every competitive device derived from such policies. The directives of Christian community are explicitly away from all competition that is the pursuit of gain for self, the gain of preferment and preference (Rom. 12; Matt. 20:20-23). We are to compete with one another—in preferring the other to self! (Rom. 12:10). If then we go up against one another, in the interests

of Christian community, let it not be in the spirit of divisiveness and dissension, but let it be out of concern for the health and power of the common life.

Christian community, finally, recognizes the actual basis for distinction between superior and inferior, but only in respect to power of will. There are the weak, there are the strong. The strong use their strength to build up the weak, so that the latter may come into full responsibility (I Cor. 8:7-13).

Here, then, are basic directives of Christian community. Individual and institutional life comes within these principles, because the Gospel is for the whole world, and not for a select clientele. The directives and standards of Christian community are not only for society's "judgment" but for its *transformation*. Hence, we who live in the world and who live also by faith in "God's community in Christ," are not called to despair for the world, or to romantic illusions about its present condition. We look for the transforming of the world, and we lay hold of the actual power of this transformation. For we make no mistake in believing that we are under judgment. But we know that the Judge is a righteous God, whose purposes are constant, whose love is enduringly effective. We are called to accept this love and to participate in this work. Our lives, our common life must be revolutionized by and towards Christian community.

### *The Particular Relevance of These Directives: Mind of Christ*

Therefore we ask how the comprehensive directive—love of neighbor, which is the mind of Christ dwelling in us—is concretely relevant in society. For the last time we say this love is more than emotion. It is a unity of emotion, will and reason, committed to bringing the "neighbor" to his highest pitch of life and power. Such a resolution makes tremendous demands upon us, inadequately suggested by the words "sacrifice" and "self-sacrifice," because this resolution calls not for diminution of one's own powers but for their quite incredible enlargement. Moreover, this "sacrifice" is—gain, increase of being, even



though life itself is thrown away in the process, a veritable dying unto God-in-Christ (Phil. 1:21). Each person dies, but to make of his death an occasion for the "building up of life"—this is a high calling.

In this comprehensive directive we have something incomparably richer than "private philanthropy" and the "service motive." The former is a first-aid measure for the casualties of our economic order, calculated (though rarely deliberately) to lower the reservoirs of resentment against the order. The "service motive" is hardly more than a pious hope that by giving something I may be able to get back more; a hope that is likely to be disappointed if everybody adopts it.

The Christian directive, to the contrary, is comprehensive. Power is enhanced by being creatively employed, that is, when the truly personal nature of each member of society is stimulated and guided towards maturity. Since this is so, a society that feels the impact of Christian directives must honor ends open to universal realization, which can be pursued without automatically defrauding persons of their rightful power. Such a society will try to employ "incentives" to which persons can respond without losing their freedom and their individuality, incentives that do not call for the corruption of emotion, the blindness of reason and the perversion of will.

### *Relevance of the Unity-in-Freedom Directive*

Let us observe next the particular relevance of the inclusive Christian directive: unity-in-freedom. If community retains even at its highest historical levels elements of arbitrariness in its human organization, we should expect to find more of this arbitrariness in society in general. This is the case. But God demands that society labor unremittingly at overcoming its own arbitrariness, its own *rigidities* of discipline. This demand has nothing whatever to do with an anarchistic ideal. We are not being led by the spirit into a promised land in which all external constraints are abolished and every man is his own master. The redemption of society does not move towards reduction of

discipline. It moves rather to make something rational out of discipline, making it increasingly responsive to the needs of persons confronting a dynamic universe. So understood there is nothing in "discipline" that wars with "freedom," nothing in "social controls" that wars with "individual rights."

The arbitrariness of institution and social process is two-fold: (a) Institutions are always to some extent adventitious, they are what they are, but other institutions in their place might have been as effective. (b) Society's controls are always external in some degree, always act in part as constraints imposed from "outside" upon the wills of persons.

As to (a) there is something inevitable, it would seem, in the efforts to provide stability and permanence to institutions by denying the chance-factor in their emergence, for what great society ever neglected, in its own way, to do just this? So to explain and justify institutions or the society as a whole is one way of discouraging irresponsible criticism and impulsive revolution. This so far is good. Institutions are not purely the products of chance. They do represent in part the efforts by men to achieve certain purposes. But it is both the elements of chance and of purposes which necessitate criticism that goes to the roots of society. For the directive of the Christian community places "under judgment" the irrelevancy and adventitiousness of institutions and the actual purposes which they serve. The directive demands that men give attention to the transformation of institutions in order to enhance the common life in Christ.

(b) The second element of arbitrariness is seen in the externality of discipline, of constraints inherent in society as such. In every society there are children, of all ages. There are the young in years, and there are those who grasp irresponsibly at things and power, however sophisticated and "mature" they may be in years. There are those who have not yet acquired understanding, and there are those who will not, and whose energies are guided, so far as they enjoy effective internal direction at all, by emotion and impulse alone. The discipline society imposes upon both (and that means upon all of us, in some

degree), is designed not merely to "internalize" its constraints; it is also to develop rational attitudes and procedures for modifying and reformulating these constraints as circumstances require. Merely to make a traditional pattern of constraints internal or self-imposed is no solution for this, because what is thus made the person's own may bear little or no positive relation to the actual situation in which a person lives. And on the other hand, what he fails to make his own, as though it were a self-imposed duty, may be needed for the healthy functioning of the society at the time. The hope of the individual's freedom, in either case, lies in his coming to see himself in relation to specific actualities. He cannot bear to do this, and he cannot act creatively from this knowledge, unless he is sustained by a community of love that is itself grounded in communion with God. In such a community the internal law that presides over all others is "the law" of love of neighbor as one's self.

### *The Relevance of the Unity-in-Diversity Directive*

The second inclusive directive is: unity-in-diversity. Here everything in our society comes under judgment that coerces uniformity and that inhibits genuine individuality-in-community. Many of these coercions in our society are concealed, but they are only the more powerful for that. We do not compel people by externally applied physical force to want the same material things, but we bombard them with a barrage of advertising from which there is no escape except through sleep, narcosis, or death. Health, wealth, social acceptance, a happy marriage, discharge of familial obligations, emotional stability, these things and many others are all persuasively represented as absolutely dependent upon the consumption of certain goods and services. We stagger around under this barrage on a circular course, producing more in order to consume more in order to produce more, wearing clothes, eating food, reading books, sharing opinions that are all "standard brands"; and the deviant is anti-social, a nut, a loony, and perhaps actively subversive.



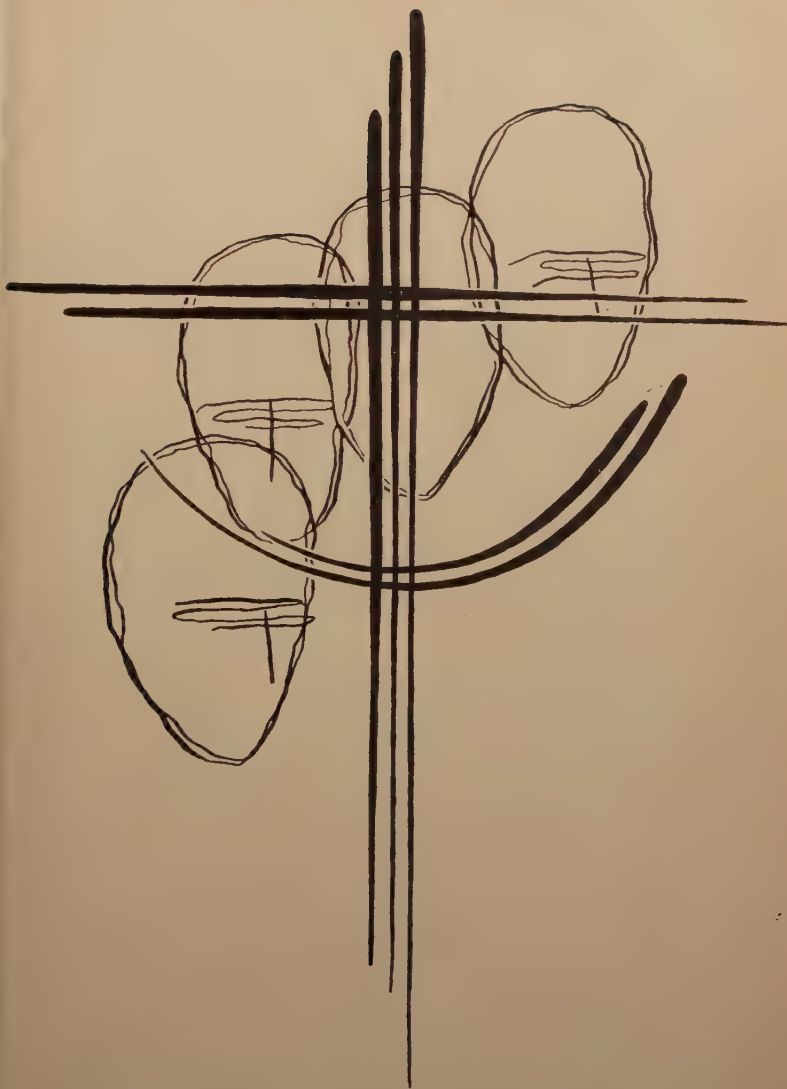
A society is unhealthy where persons do not dare to be themselves, or in which they have to risk everything for this. People can be really and fully themselves neither in the atmosphere of rigid conformity nor in the context of brazen unconventionality. Conventions are media of communication, in the end; they are patterns for the organization of the positive energies of personal beings, each of whom is a unique creation of God, loved by him infinitely and enduringly.

## THE CHURCH

Now at the last we ask ourselves: is there some good reason for not speaking of the *church* as the Christian community? Is she not the preacher of the Gospel? Is she not the champion and embodiment of the directives and standards of the Kingdom of God? To the first question we must say, Yes, although we say it many times sorrowfully and in deep humility. To the second question we say, Yes, and sometimes we say it joyfully. To the last question, we can only say, Yes and No.

### *The Church's Involvement in the World*

The church in history (this we must call it rather than the church militant because its militancy is so often like that of Don Quixote before the windmill, except when the church itself is the windmill) is not Christian community itself, and it is certainly not *the* Christian community. It is an "earthen vessel," even when it has a marble reredos. It participates to the full in all the distortions and corruptions of society. It knows from long practice every form of ruthless grasp of power, and every egregious and every subtle shedding of responsibility. Where it supposes it transcends the world, it is merely withdrawn from the world. Where it vaunts itself for ministering to the world, it merely toadies to dominions and powers. Where it racks up merits for itself because of the cup of cold water it extends to the thirsty, it overlooks the fact that the cup is a sieve. Therefore we cannot seriously suppose that this comfort-station, this illusion-blower, this aspirin-canteen, this sky-writer, is Christian community, the obedient servant of the Most High!



## *The Church as Preacher of the Gospel*

But this prodigal son is nonetheless the preacher of the Gospel. Yes, it is so. The Gospel is not given to it; it is bound to the Gospel. The Gospel is the living God speaking in the living Christ, and He has more voices, this Christ, than all the ecclesiastical statisticians in all time could enumerate. But this Lord uses his earthen vessel, and makes himself known through all its stammers and frightened whispers. His directives keep bearing in upon it inwardly. They come out of it badly crippled, but they survive: the mutilated Gospel, like the crucified Christ, rises again. Herein is the power of God unto salvation shown forth. In herself the church witnesses to this power.

But this does not mean that the church is first transformed in itself and then becomes the expanding nuclear core of transformation in society. The "dialectic of redemption" is between God and particular persons with all their involvements in institutions, and with all the reciprocal influences of their institutions upon one another. Because God addresses us in Jesus Christ, and calls us to enter through faith into the give-and-take of creative love, we are able to make out the actual community that underlies all "ideal" constructions, all social structures. We are able to lay hold of the power of *this* community, of this dynamic "church of the spirit." *This* Church is nomadic, wholly resistant to domestication. Application into this membership may be filed through its settled representatives, the "churches." These, at their best, provide some valuable training; but there is nothing automatic about acceptance in the wider and deeper Communion.

Well, *what* training, for our times? Answer this question with a question: into what areas must "brotherly concern" penetrate to understand our concrete situation and the possibilities for its transformation? Politics, economics, public opinion, world affairs—at the bare mention of these words vast, complex institutions and processes are conjured. All right, so long as we remember that these are all patterns of human activity, answerable to divine justice, transformable through divine love.



The local church demands a "program," a locally relevant pattern in which to set forth the demands and promises of God in Jesus Christ. It will not be locally relevant unless it incorporates three things: (1) a recognition that the key problems in its locality are pervasive problems in our society, resolvable only by comprehensive action; (2) faith in the absolutely comprehensive outreach of God's redemptive concern; (3) faith in the sustaining reality of a community-in-love, even Jesus Christ, "by whom we are renewed day by day," and in which our listlessness is transformed into zeal, our terror into boldness, our despair into hope.

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## Discussion Questions

1. What exactly is "changeless" in the Gospel? Name some of the ideas that people have thought were changeless aspects of the Gospel, but which proved historically to be the ideas of a particular group in a particular society.
2. The authors stress the *continuous activity* of God. What bearing does this have upon the perception that society is dynamic, not static? What vested interests are there in a static view of "the American way of life"?
3. Is there any validity in the oft-spoken-of dilemma of the heart vs. reason?
4. How does our understanding of the cruciality of the general will decisively undercut the cliché, "But you have to convert the individual first"?
5. Describe the "negotiable compensations" offered in the pages of the *Reader's Digest*. In your church publications. In the activities of the churches in your community.
6. Distinguish between the directive of *unity-in-diversity* and the liberal democratic notion of "tolerance." Do you "tolerate" a white gentile, a Jew, a Negro because they are like you?
7. What is the relation between the authors' accent upon the "actual world" and the necessity of the churches accepting the discipline of factual understanding?
8. "The church is the heart of society." Discuss.

## Good Reading

Bennett, John C. *Christianity and Communism*. New York: Association Press, 1948 (A Haddam House Book).

——— *Social Salvation*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

These two books by Dr. Bennett are useful for persons with little or no previous training in the general area of theological ethics.

Casserley, J. V. L. *No Faith of My Own*. Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950.

This is intended as an introduction to the basic claims of the Christian faith. The author is particularly concerned to relate these claims to some of the fundamental problems of the present situation.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943.

The most comprehensive formulation of Christian realism from the Protestant perspective.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper and Bros., 1951.

A clear and suggestive discussion of the historically important ways in which Jesus Christ has been understood in relation to the contemporary culture.

Ramsey, Paul. *Basic Christian Ethics*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950.

A clear presentation and critical evaluation of some systems of Christian Ethics.

Temple, William. *Christianity and the Social Order*. New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1942.

One of the great and lucid Anglican statements of the principles of Christianity as they affect society.

### COVER AND ILLUSTRATIONS

*Social Action* has chosen the chalice and the cross for its symbols of the Christian Community. They are for Christians the most enduring and most meaningful in terms of the love and sacrifice that bind men together in community.

The first illustration in this issue is an image of modern man. The second is man oriented toward nothing in particular, pulled in many directions by others who wish to control him. The third is man in the context of the many institutions of his daily life—the office buildings of the great bureaucracies of business, government, labor, religion. And the fourth is a suggested symbol of the Christian Community in which man has found a compelling faith that gives meaning not only to his life as an individual person but also to the groups and movements which are the stuff of his daily existence.



(Editor's note: The May issue of SOCIAL ACTION stated that Percy L. Greaves, Jr. "worked as an investigator under J. Parnell Thomas for the House Un-American Activities Committee." We have received the following communication from Mr. Greaves stating that he never "worked as an investigator under J. Parnell Thomas."

Dear Sir:

A knock by the wrong wing is always a boost for the right wing. For that reason I enjoyed reading the mixture of facts and fancies presented by George D. Younger in the May 15, 1951 issue of *Social Action*.

But when his fiction stoops to libel I must rebel. While I was Associate Research Director of the Republican National Committee I never "worked as an investigator under J. Parnell Thomas", nor do any of Mr. Younger's cited references say I did. The official records of the House of Representatives will show that while I served on the House Committee on Education and Labor I was at no time on the payroll of either Mr. Thomas or his Committee....

—PERCY L. GREAVES, JR.  
New York City

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